



WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF
Natural Resources

Doug Sutherland - Commissioner of Public Lands



State Program Protects Streamside Habitat and Compensates Landowners

The Riparian Open Space Program

In 1999, the Washington State Legislature responded to the federal Endangered Species Act listing of several salmonid species by authorizing the Forest Practices Board to adopt rules for salmon recovery. These rules increased the size of riparian buffers and created further measures to protect water quality and restore salmon habitat. Recognizing that these rules would have a disproportionate impact on forest landowners, provisions were included in the legislation to create the Riparian Open Space Program to be managed by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The Riparian Open Space Program compensates eligible forest landowners for important habitat in what statutes define as “unconfined avulsing channel migration zones [CMZ].” These lands are essentially islands of timber within rivers or streams along shores where river channels have suddenly changed course as a result of a major flood event.

Funding appropriated by the Legislature will pay for acquisition of private lands or permanent conservation easements. After acquiring ownership or easement through the Riparian Open Space Program, the property will be “managed only in a manner necessary for ecological protection or fisheries enhancement.”

Application Process

Qualifying landowners can apply to convey a permanent conservation interest to the State covering the timber in designated forest land that exists along migrating stream channels. There are also options to donate or sell the land and/or timber in fee to the State.

To qualify for compensation through the Riparian Open Space Program, lands must be:

- ☐ located within an unconfined avulsing channel migration zone as determined by the DNR Forest Practices regulations,
- ☐ identified on county assessor records as forest land, or
- ☐ currently taxed as forest land

DNR welcomes applications from all landowners. Information on the application and selection process is available from the DNR’s website, <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/htdocs/amp/riparian/index.html>. You may also contact our staff by e-mail at omroa.bhagwandin@dnr.wa.gov, or call the Conservation Land Acquisitions section at 360-902-1059.

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